



PRESS RELEASE

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Europe's forests: huge potential in mitigating climate change

FOREST EUROPE report reveals trends in sustainable management and challenges ahead

Europe has the most forest-rich region in the world. It represents 25% of our global forest resources. Europe's expanding forests have a huge potential to mitigate climate change. They provide the renewable materials wood and energy' and foster a green economy. Sustainable forest management practices increasingly promote conservation of biodiversity. But, forests are also threatened by diseases and extreme weather conditions, such as storms, as well as fires. These are the main results which derive from the report on the State of Europe's Forests 2011, which has been launched today in Oslo, Norway. The launch takes place on the occasion of the FOREST EUROPE Ministerial Conference on the Protection in Forests in Europe. The conference will convene until 16 June. At the conference in Oslo, ministers responsible for forests, as well as high-level representatives from 46 countries and the European Union meet to take decisions aimed at preserving forests and safeguarding their environmental, societal and economic benefits for present and future generations.

HRH Crown Prince Haakon of Norway officially opened the FOREST EUROPE Ministerial Conference in Oslo.

The overall aim of the presented State of Europe's Forests 2011 report is to provide decision makers and the broad public with up-to-date, comprehensive and fact-based information on the status and trends in forests and sustainable forest management in Europe in the period 1990-2010. The report has been jointly prepared by FOREST EUROPE, UNECE and FAO.

The FOREST EUROPE Ministerial Conference in Oslo, under Norwegian chairmanship, is the sixth in a row since the ministerial collaboration started in Strasbourg in 1990. Much progress has been made in finding a common policy voice and appropriate action to recognise Europe's forests as a vital shared resource - not only among the signatory countries but also as a global resource.

A common understanding of what sustainable forest management means has been an important part of the collaboration between European forest ministers within FOREST EUROPE. They have developed common principles, criteria and guidelines for the sustainable management of forest resources. "FOREST EUROPE has considered all major issues related to sustainable management of Europe's forest: environmental – including forest biodiversity protection - social and economic issues, including forests' importance for energy and water. This has established a solid ground for growth and diversity in today's forests", said the Norwegian Minister of Agriculture and Food, Mr Lars Peder Brekk, at today's press conference in Oslo.

The 46 FOREST EUROPE countries, which include the Russian Federation, cover 25% of the total world forest area. Europe is the most forest-rich region in the world, with 45% of the land area covered by forests.



The 2011 report demonstrates that forests, sustainable forest management and wood products represent a huge potential in mitigating climate change. Growing forests sequester carbon, while wood products continue to store carbon throughout their life time. Between 2005 and 2010, Europe's forests have annually absorbed about 870 million tonnes of CO₂ from the atmosphere, an amount similar to about 10% of the region's green-house gas emissions in 2008.

Other important services offered by forests include the production of the environmental friendly raw material wood for many products, and renewable energy. Forests are also vital for conserving biodiversity and providing a home to an amazing variety of plants and animals. Protected forest areas in the FOREST EUROPE region have increased by about half a million hectares over the last 10 years (i.e. about the size of Slovakia or Switzerland). This is mainly due to successful policies enacted by the governments in the region to protect biodiversity.

Balancing and securing the provision of forest goods and services in order to fulfil and accommodate many different societal needs is one of the biggest challenges that countries face. This applies in particular to the increased demand for the supply of wood and renewable energy to combat climate change, while concurrently trying to meet the goals of halting loss of biodiversity and maintaining other forest services. "Sound and effective policies for forests and their management are required to sustain the environmental, economic and social benefits of forests. The results of the report are essential for policy decision makers for formulating effective future forest policies", Mr Brekk said.

The report also shows that Europe's growing forests have a huge potential for fostering a green, low carbon economy and creating new jobs. In Europe, a total of 4 million people are employed in forestry and forest based enterprises.

Despite good news, a number of threats remain. In many parts of Europe, air pollution has been negatively affecting forest soils, and in consequence the natural balance of species. One percent of Europe's forests are reported to be damaged, mostly by insects and diseases. However, this percentage could be an underestimation. In addition, damaging factors, such as storms, wind and fires may be expected to increase along with a changing climate.

In response to the challenges and opportunities identified in the State of Europe's Forests 2011 report, and based on thorough political discussions, the ministers responsible for forests in Europe meet in Oslo from 14-16 June 2011 to decide on further political actions. During the 2-day high-level political dialogue, the ministers are deliberating a common vision, strategic goals and measurable targets for European forests by 2020. The ministers are further expected to agree on the Oslo mandate for negotiating a legally binding agreement on forests in Europe. Such an agreement is a historical step forward – for forests and for a European and global forest policy cooperation. This European cooperation responds to the difficult discussions on a global forest convention that started already before the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

If ministers at the conference in Oslo decide to launch negotiations on a legally binding agreement, Europe will reconfirm its political will and ability to lead the way on complex issues of forest management: to the benefit of people, our environment and the globe. The FOREST EUROPE Ministerial Conference also represents a major European contribution in highlighting the importance of forests in the International Year of Forests 2011.



The State of Europe's Forests 2011 report and Summary for Policy Makers may be downloaded here: www.foresteuropa.org/Publications

- For more information about the FOREST EUROPE Ministerial Conference Oslo 2011 visit www.foresteuropa.org/conference2011.
- For more information about FOREST EUROPE visit www.foresteuropa.org.
- For further information about the International Year of Forests, visit www.un.org/en/events/iyof2011.

About FOREST EUROPE – The Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe

FOREST EUROPE is the pan-European policy process for the sustainable management of the continent's forests. It develops common strategies for its 46 participating countries and the European Union on how to protect and sustainably manage forests. Founded in 1990, the continuous cooperation of FOREST EUROPE has led to achievements, such as the guidelines, indicators and criteria for sustainable forest management. In total, 52 countries outside Europe, as well as international organisations actively contribute to the work of FOREST EUROPE as observers.

As a priority, FOREST EUROPE focuses on strengthening the role of forests in mitigating climate change, enhancing and preserving forest biodiversity, securing the supply of good-quality fresh water, and providing renewable forest products. Other important tasks are to develop a framework for future political collaboration and to prepare options for decision by ministers on a possible legally binding agreement on forests in Europe. Norway currently holds the FOREST EUROPE chairmanship, and is hosting the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe on 14-16 June 2011 in Oslo. Spain will take over the chairmanship at the Ministerial Conference in Norway.

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